

This Christmas my Mother-in-law, Judy, added something quite odd to her list. She wanted a car GPS system, one of those electronic mapping systems that help you drive to your destination. That's odd for my in-laws as it is relatively new technology and they just don't do well with technology.

Here's an example. They kept their tube TV so long that the screen quit working, but they continued to listen to the shows with no video. I found this out when I asked my Father-in-law, Calvin, what he was up to today and he said he was listening to golf. Listening. To Golf. Watching golf on TV is not exactly a thrill-a-minute, but to listen to it only? Wow. We got him a new TV for Father's Day so now he can actually see the shots.

Recently his VCR quit working. Yes, I said VCR. He was mad because he had "just bought that a few years ago." Of course it was 15 years ago. I had to break it to him that it may be difficult to buy a new VCR since the last company stopped making them in 2016.

They have had issues with movies they have rented. During one point in the movie Everest a black pop up box came up, filling about 80% of the screen. The DVD player (yes, they got one) had an issue but it said "stand by" in the box so they did—for 45 minutes they continued watching the movie using the one-inch area around the box. (Eventually they turned the DVD player off then back on again and it worked – after the movie was over of course). Judy wrote a scathing review of the movie Everest online after that, like the movie itself had anything to do with the black box problem. I guess a movie with a big box in the middle of the screen is still better than listening to golf.

So technology just hasn't worked for them, or if it has then they just rarely update it. So that is why I was surprised to see a car GPS on the list, but I got one for them. I thought a good story might happen, and, well, it did. You're probably expecting one of those, "I drove my car into the pond because it told me to," stories, but not this time.

I set it up for them the best I could and gave it to them. Wisely they decided to try it out by going to a location they knew well, the house of some old friends. While the GPS didn't know the name of every unpaved road it did get them close and all went well.

After a nice visit they started back home. The GPS was giving directions to home just as it had before, but this time, according to my Mother-in-law, it was making an extra little "mew" sound. The sound was quite random in interval and got louder from time to time. Mew...MEW...MEW! Then they got mad at me. Judy said, "Brian must have programmed this with nature sounds. Why does he do stuff like that!?!"

They were getting frustrated with the GPS and its nature sounds, trying to find a way to shut it off, when suddenly a cat jumped from the back seat to the front. That's right, they accidentally stole their friends' cat. He must have jumped in when they were not looking.

So they misinterpreted the data from the GPS and the DVD player. The "mew" was not what they thought it was. The black box was not part of the movie. And they might have blamed the wrong people - me, the GPS, and the people who made the movie Everest.

Data is very important to any organization, but just as important as gathering the data is correct interpretation of that data. Are these results directly related to one thing, or are they correlated with something else? Is there a cause and effect happening (a "mew" from the GPS) or is it just happenstance that there is a stowaway cat in the backseat while we are trying out the new technology?

NCCC seeks out a lot of data as to how it is doing and tries to interpret that data accurately. Recently our enrollment has fallen about 4.5%. Is that because of a missed opportunity, something we have done or didn't do? Here's the rest of the data. The average age of our students has fallen in recent years from 29 to 24 years old. The unemployment level in our service area is at a 10 year low. Our non-traditional students, those over the age of 25, do not need to come to the college for retraining for a new job like they did in 2009, they have a job. That is bringing down enrollment and that's okay. We are here to help them train for a new job and it worked! They earned a new job.

NCCC uses data from 30 different sources to determine where we are accomplishing our mission and where we need improvement. Each year we put out a "grade card" known as the Institutional Effectiveness Dashboard to our trustees showing not only the data from these sources, but also an interpretation of that data. The trustees use that dashboard to evaluate the College and me as its president.

And there is some additional data we need – yours! I am asking for your thoughts and opinions on NCCC and the job it is doing enriching our communities and our students' lives. Here is a link to a short open-ended survey where you can tell me how you feel about Neosho County Community College – things we do well that you would like to see us continue, and things we need to work on. As it is open-ended you can spend as much or as little time as you want filling out the form.

At the end of the spring we will begin interpreting the data and a final report known as an environmental scan will be released to the trustees. If you would like a copy of the final report send me an email and when it's done I'll send you a copy.

Here is the link to the online survey: <https://goo.gl/Aeun3g>

I greatly appreciate your time and thoughts!

My in-laws returned the stowaway cat to their friends and are planning to use the GPS for a long trip to see some the grandkids who have moved away. I fear for that GPS system, but knowing those two, when they get back there will be a new story to tell.

If you have any comments or questions about this column or anything else please contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).